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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

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July 18, 2000

The Honorable Janet Reno
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Madam Attorney General:

A very long time ago I provided the Justice Department with what I believe to be significant information about Vice President Gore and his knowledge of important aspects of the 1996 campaign finance scandal. For some reason, you have chosen to ignore this information. It was my hope that you would follow up on the information provided. However, you have interviewed the Vice President five times and you have failed to ask a single question about this matter. Therefore, I feel compelled to raise this issue once again.

But for this Committee's subpoena to obtain interview transcripts of the President and Vice President, the American people would not have learned about the Justice Department's failure to ask the President about foreign money, or the failure to ask the Vice President about the Hsi Lai Temple. But for this letter, the American people would not have learned that your Justice Department is completely disinterested in asking a single question about what appears to be a suggestion by the Vice President to show illegally funded political advertisements to Indonesian billionaire James Riady.

The new information that you have chosen to ignore is perhaps more deeply troubling than any of the information that has been publicly disclosed. The fact that your Campaign Finance Task Force chose not to ask the Vice President about this information when it re-interviewed the Vice President earlier this year is astounding. There is no excuse for ignoring this evidence, just as there is no excuse for your waiting nearly four years to ask the President about foreign money or ask the Vice President about the Hsi Lai Temple.

I provided the Justice Department ample time to ask questions about this new evidence and your investigation did nothing. Therefore, let me explain again, so that at least there is a public record of your having been put on notice, why I am so concerned.

After failing to comply with this Committee's March 4, 1997, subpoena, the White House finally was forced to turn over video tapes of White House fundraising events. The White House provided poor quality VHS tapes of Beta recordings. Among the material produced by the White House was a video tape of a December 15, 1995, White House coffee. The Committee recently subpoenaed the original Beta tape of the event, and the audio portion of this tape appears to indicate that Vice President Albert Gore, Jr. suggested that Democratic National Committee issue advertisements be played for Indonesian billionaire James Riady. The Vice President apparently states:

We oughta, we oughta, we oughta show Mr. Riady the tapes, some of the ad tapes.

Apart from the President, and perhaps some fundraisers, the only guest at this coffee who knew Mr. Riady was Indonesian gardener Arief Wiriadinata. His father-in-law was a partner of Mr. Riady and he illegally gave \$455,000 to the Democratic National Committee in 1995 and 1996. Given the Vice President's apparent location in the room – and the apparent location of Mr. Wiriadinata – it is a reasonable assumption that Vice President Gore was making this suggestion to Mr. Wiriadinata. It would indeed be extraordinary for the Vice President to suggest showing political issue advertisements to an Indonesian billionaire who lives in Jakarta, Indonesia.

You should also be aware that – according to the Vice President's recent sworn testimony – just four days before the Vice President made this statement, he was in Chicago showing tapes of the issue advertisements “for the purpose of discussing the media fund with likely contributors.”¹ Thus, in the Vice President's mind, there was a clear nexus between the political advertisements and political contributors. Thus, one logical conclusion is that the Vice President had an understanding that there was a benefit associated with showing Mr. Riady the issue advertisements.

At a minimum, it is deeply disturbing that the Justice Department has failed to take this piece of potential evidence seriously. The Vice President has never been asked about this exchange. Fundamental fairness, it would seem, requires the Justice Department to at least ask questions to see if the Vice President did indeed suggest showing political advertisements to Mr. Riady. Furthermore, it is my hope that you will ask such questions in the near future, and not wait as long – three years and seven months – as it took to raise the Hsi Lai Temple matter with the Vice President.

The apparent statement by the Vice President to Mr. Wiriadinata suggests certain basic questions that should have been asked at least three years ago:

1. Did the Vice President make this suggestion to Mr. Wiriadinata? If so, why?

¹ Transcript of Campaign Financing Task Force Interview with Vice President Albert A. Gore, Jr., November 11, 1997.

2. Did Mr. Riady's money help pay for the Democratic National Committee issue advertisements?
3. Did Mr. Gore know anything about Mr. Riady's campaign contributions and how they related to the issue advertisement campaign?
4. In his Justice Department interview, the Vice President stated that he had seen James Riady only "twice in my life." One of those times was in Malaysia and the other time was "when he was in Betty Currie's office preparing to go in to see the President with a couple of other people."² The Vice President does not describe the type of relationship with Mr. Riady that would lead him to suggest a private screening of political advertisements in Jakarta, Indonesia. Therefore, if the Vice President made a suggestion about showing tapes to Mr. Riady, what did he know about Mr. Riady that would lead him to make this suggestion in the presence of Mr. Wiriadinata?
5. If Vice President Gore made this statement, what did Vice President Gore know about Mr. Wiriadinata's relationship with Mr. Riady that would have made him comfortable with the suggestion about showing Mr. Riady issue advertisements in Jakarta, Indonesia?
6. Why have your subordinates avoided questioning Vice President Gore about these matters? At a minimum, it would have been relatively simple to have at least raised the issue. You have interviewed Vice President Gore five times and not once has anyone asked a question about Mr. Wiriadinata.
7. Have you refrained from asking questions about this matter because of concerns about asking the Vice President questions that would be difficult for him to answer during an election year?

When this tape – one withheld from this Committee by the White House for a considerable period of time, I might add – was brought to the attention of the Justice Department, I expected your investigators to move forward with dispatch. Unfortunately, nearly half a year has passed, and I am concerned that your Department has been sitting on important information in order to benefit the President and the Vice President.

As I have said repeatedly since we obtained the President's and Vice President's FBI interview summaries in 1999, I have grave concerns that your subordinates failed to ask important questions of the President and Vice President for so long. A three year and seven month delay in asking the Vice President a single question about the Hsi Lai Temple is inexplicable. While you say frequently that an independent counsel for the campaign finance scandal was unnecessary, I am left only with the fact of questions not asked and leads not followed. Your prosecutors were complaining of legal "gamesmanship" and "contortions." At the same time, other advisers were leaking information beneficial to friends of the President and defendants in prosecutions. In addition, while this was going on, you were giving the President and Vice President

² Transcript of Campaign Financing Task Force Interview with Vice President Albert A. Gore, Jr., April 18, 2000, at pp. 109-110.

preferential treatment by failing to ask necessary questions or subpoena documents. When the Vice President wanted to release evidence that you had withheld from Congress, you were complicit. Furthermore, your subordinates have still failed to subpoena important documents from the White House.

To recapitulate:

- John Huang testified that Mr. Riady allegedly offered the President one million dollars in 1992 for his Presidential campaign.
- Mr. Riady did in fact provide at least \$800,000 in illegal campaign contributions to the Clinton-Gore campaign and the DNC.
- Mr. Wiriadinata and his wife gave at least \$455,000 in political contributions to the DNC over a short period of time.
- Vice President Gore appears to suggest that “we” should show the political advertisements made in late 1995 to a non-citizen living in Jakarta, Indonesia.
- The Vice President, just days before he appears to have made this suggestion, was using the political advertisements to show people what their political contributions were paying for and, presumably, to encourage them to give more.
- Eleven days before Vice President Gore appears to make this statement to Mr. Wiriadinata, John Huang began working at the DNC.

Your record in the campaign finance investigation is unfortunate. I watched your testimony recently about campaign finance matters. The thing that struck me was the complete divergence between what you said, and what has actually happened. The facts all support the plain conclusion that you have failed to do even a minimally competent job. Each time you talk about the campaign finance investigation you talk about the indictments brought by the Justice Department. Yet, to me, you sound like the captain of the Titanic explaining how the water may be cold, but things aren’t so bad because the first half of the trip went fairly well. From my perspective, and from the perspectives of some of the senior lawyers in your own investigation, it appears that you have treated senior political officials differently than low level conduit contributors.

Now that it is 2000, at a minimum, please take a serious look at the December 15, 1995, White House coffee tape and determine if the Vice President did indeed make the following statement:

We oughta, we oughta, we oughta show Mr. Riady the tapes, some of the ad tapes.

If you are interested, the Committee on Government Reform has the original Beta tape and I would be willing to make arrangements to furnish this evidence to you.

Sincerely


Dan Burton
Chairman

cc: The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
The Honorable Members, Committee on Government Reform
Louis Freeh, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation